

Letter from Alexander Graham Bell to Mabel Hubbard Bell, February 23, 1901, with transcript

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL TO MABEL (Hubbard) BELL Volta Bureau, Washington, D. C. February 23, 1901. Mrs. A. Graham Bell, Paris, France. My darling Mabel:

Your cablegram "All well" in answer to mine "Femella", has greatly relieved my mind. I never knew you to faint before — and even before I knew you — away back in your girlish days — I don't think you were ever guilty of such an action. Why then now? There must be something wrong — you must be really ill to have such a complete collapse — and then your letter said so little about it — that it looked like a concealment of something — and I feared something worse behind. And Oh! — the slowness of the mails — I could not expect a written reply to a written question for nearly a MONTH ! Three weeks at least in the mere transportation of the mail — and probably a week for incidental delays. Such a thought as this takes all the life out of correspondence — and makes a letter only a sort of historical record of what was — not is. I have never been so anxious in my life before. The thought of the distance that separates us — and the fear that you were ill without my being told exactly about it — has upset me completely — and I have learned my darling that you are very dear to me — and that what affects you affects me also. I have a lot to tell you dear about many matters — but I have lost the knack of easy writing (I never had it) and can write best by dictation . I must wait till Monday, however, for Miss Safford. She would willingly come 2 on Sunday if I needed her — but it is good that Sunday should be a day of rest — and I will let her be.

I enclose two pages from the Congressional Record, and an extract from the Deficiency Bill — (which has passed the House and is now in the Senate.) You will see that the conference of the Committees representing Agricultural College — Washington Academy — and George Washington Memorial Association. (N.E.A. Committee did not take part) —

Library of Congress

has already born fruit. I have thought it best — as a Regent of the Smithsonian — to take a back seat — and let others do the work. I have made suggestions only — and let others do the work. I have made suggestions only — and have urged the others to go ahead and do whatever they think best — recommending them simply to come together and agree upon a common place. I was not present at the meeting and do not yet know what common understanding was reached — Mr. Walcott has started matters in Congress and he has only now let me know — by telephone — what he has done.

He prepared a Joint Resolution of Congress on the lines of the Smithsonian Resolution which was offered in the Senate by Senator Perkins and in the House by Mr. Sherman of New York. The resolution was referred in each branch of Congress, to an appropriate Committee. On account of the pressure of matters in Congress there seemed to be no chance for legislation this Congress excepting in the matter of appropriations — and it was decided to tack on the proposed resolution as an amendment to the Deficiency Bill (an urgency 3 measure) — although it does not carry an appropriation.

I don't like this mode of procedure — but I am not responsible for it — and knew nothing about it until today. In principle it is wrong — not an honest and straight forward proceeding — and I do not approve of the method at all. If such a resolution is passed — I should like it to be passed because Congress after full and mature deliberation, APPROVED of it. Whereas the idea seems to be that in the rush of business during the closing hours of Congress the thing may slip through as an appendix to an urgency measure to which it does not relate.

The attempt will probably be successful — but I cannot say that I am proud of it — and feel rather indifferent as to what may be its ultimate fate in the Senate.

I fear that a resolution — so obtained — may do damage to its own cause. It is surely strong enough to be passed upon its own merits — and the attempt to smuggle it through will — or rather should I think — render Congress suspicious of the promoters, and render

Library of Congress

it more difficult, later on for them to get further action. There is a certain flavor of immorality about the matter that offends my sense of right and wrong. It is indirect legislation — instead of fair and square open legislation — based upon full discussion of the merits. I have the same feeling in regard to indirect taxation. It is so much more easy to raise money for government uses — indirectly than directly — that we are apt to lose sight of the immorality of the proceeding. By indirect taxation we steal money from the people without their knowledge! And in this way — no doubt — raise more money than they would be willing to give as voluntarily if directly asked for it — and with less fuss and bother. But how about the morality of the whole transaction. When thieves are good and honest men — then — and then only — will such actions be right. That's my feeling in a nut shell. And query — are we attempting to steal an act from the legislature?

Your loving husband, Alec.